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Halfway in Central America

President Reagan ought to take a cue from Representative Clarence D. Long when he addresses Congress tonight on the troubles and turbulence in Central America. The Maryland Democrat's appropriations subcommittee reprogrammed \$30 million in military aid for El Salvador yesterday in exchange for promises by Secretary of State George P. Shultz to push for peaceful solutions and human rights. Mr. Long's conditions included the appointment of a high-level envoy, independent legal review of FBI raw files in the deaths of U.S. citizens, the opening of Salvadoran prisons and detention centers to unannounced visits by Red Cross teams and the release of political prisoners by the Salvadoran government.

The Long package represents a legislative effort to meet the administration halfway. Literally. The hawks on his subcommittee wanted the full \$60 million requested by the administration. The doves wanted zero. Mr. Long captured the middle ground on a 7-5 vote after a quick two-day visit to San Salvador and talks with President Alvaro Magana and Defense Minister Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova.

Now it is time for President Reagan to meet the Congress halfway. Instead of drum-beating the Communist menace to Latin America in a way that arouses fears of another Vietnam, he should place heavy emphasis on what the United States can do to stop the fighting that has taken so many thousands of lives. That means elections in El Salvador later this year in which all parties (leftists

included) will have international protection. It means a concerted effort by the Magana government to end indiscriminate killings and torture by security forces and illegal mass jailings of political prisoners. And, in getting down to the nitty-gritty, it means effective military action to prevent insurgents from undermining the economy and intimidating villagers.

The latter point is a sensitive one, especially for the administration's embattled policies in Nicaragua. For if Mr. Reagan is to plead for sufficient military aid to maintain the Magana government, he cannot ask for a blank check to undermine the Sandinista government through covert CIA action. The United States cannot be selective if it wishes to be credible in promoting orderly democratic processes in Latin America.

If the Sandinistas insist on being regional trouble-makers, as Libya's secret shipment of military supplies suggests, then they should be called down by their neighbors. Mr. Reagan's endorsement of a regional negotiation that might draw Nicaragua to the bargaining table would be a positive step.

Above all, the president should make it clear he is interested in peaceful, not military, solutions to the wrenching problems of Central America. For too long, the region has been neglected and exploited by the United States. Now that Central America is a subject of almost obsessive interest, humanity and strategic necessity ought to put the U.S. emphasis on economic growth and political reconciliation.